

## **DETERMINING THE LIQUID LIMIT OF SOILS FOP FOR AASHTO T 89**

### **Scope**

This procedure covers the determination of the liquid limit of a soil in accordance with AASHTO T 89. It is used in conjunction with AASHTO T 90, Determining the Plastic Limit and Plasticity Index of Soils. The three values are used for soil classification and other purposes.

### **Apparatus**

- Dish: preferably unglazed porcelain or similar mixing dish, about 115 mm (4.5 in.) in diameter.
- Spatula: having a blade 75 to 100 mm (3 to 4 in.) long and about 20 mm (3/4 in.) wide.
- Liquid Limit Device: manually or mechanically operated, consisting of a brass cup, carriage, and base plate.
- Grooving Tool: used to cut the soil in the liquid limit device cup.
- Gauge: part of the grooving tool or a separate metal bar,  $10.0 \pm 0.2$  mm ( $0.394 \pm 0.008$  in.) thick and approximately 50 mm (2 in.) long.
- Containers: corrosion resistant, suitable for repeated heating and cooling, having close fitting lids to prevent the loss of moisture. One container is needed for each moisture content determination.
- Balance: conforming to AASHTO M 231, class C, sensitive to 0.01 g with a 1200 g capacity.
- Oven: thermostatically controlled, capable of maintaining temperatures of  $110 \pm 5^\circ\text{C}$  ( $230 \pm 9^\circ\text{F}$ ).
- Graduated cylinders for measuring distilled or demineralized water.

### **Adjustment of Liquid Limit Device**

The liquid limit device shall be inspected to determine that the device is in good working order; that the pin connecting the cup is not worn to permit side play; that the screws connecting the cup to the hanger are tight; that the points of contact on the cup and base are not excessively worn; that the lip of the cup is not excessively worn; and that a groove has not been worn in the cup. The grooving tool shall be inspected to determine that the critical dimensions are correct.

***Note 1:*** Wear is considered excessive when the point of contact on the cup or base exceeds approximately 13 mm (0.5 in.) in diameter, or when any point on the rim of the cup is worn to approximately 1/2 the original thickness. A slight groove in the center of the cup is not objectionable. If the groove becomes pronounced, the cup shall be replaced. A base that is excessively worn may be refinished as long as it is maintained within the tolerances specified.

Adjust the height of drop of the cup so that the point on the cup that comes in contact with the base rises to a height of  $10.0 \pm 0.2$  mm ( $0.394 \pm 0.008$  in.).

**Note 2:** Check the height of the drop, before each use, by turning the crank at two revolutions per second while holding the gauge in position against the cup. If a ringing or clicking sound is heard without the cup rising from the gauge, the adjustment is correct. If no ringing is heard or if the cup rises from gauge, readjust the height of the drop. If the cup rocks on the gauge during this checking operation, the cam follower pivot is excessively worn and should be replaced.

## Sample

Obtain a sample with a mass of about 100 g taken from the portion of the material passing the 0.425 mm (No. 40) sieve.

The mass required depends upon the method chosen. Method A (multi-point method) requires approximately 100 g. Method B (single point method) requires approximately 50 g.

## Procedure – Method A (Multi-Point)

1. Place the sample in the dish and thoroughly mix with 15 to 20 mL of distilled or demineralized water by alternately and repeatedly stirring, kneading, and chopping with a spatula. Further additions of water shall be in increments of 1 to 3 mL. Each increment shall be thoroughly mixed with the soil before another increment is added. Once testing has begun, no additional dry soil should be added to the moistened soil. The cup of the Liquid Limit device shall not be used for mixing soil and water. If too much water is added, the sample shall either be discarded or mixed and kneaded until natural evaporation lowers the moisture content.

**Note 3:** Some soils are slow to absorb water. It is possible to add water so fast that a false LL value is obtained. This can be avoided by allowing more mixing and/or time. Also, tap water may be used for routine testing if comparative tests indicate no differences in results between using tap water and distilled or demineralized water.

2. Add sufficient water to form a uniform mass of a stiff consistency.
3. Place enough material in the cup so that, when squeezed and spread with the spatula, the soil will rest in the cup above the spot where the cup rests on the base and will be 10 mm thick at the point of maximum thickness. Use as few strokes of the spatula as possible, taking care to prevent the entrapment of air bubbles in the sample.
4. Divide the soil in the cup with a firm stroke of the grooving tool. Avoid tearing of the sides of the groove or slipping of the soil cake on the cup. Up to six strokes are permitted. The depth of the groove should be increased with each stroke, and only the last stroke should scrape the bottom of the cup.
5. Lift and drop the cup by turning the crank at a rate of approximately two revolutions per second until the two halves of the soil pat come together along a distance of about 13 mm (0.5 in.). Do not hold the base while the crank is turned. Record the number of shocks required to close the groove.

*Note 4:* Some soils tend to slide on the cup instead of flowing. If this occurs, water should be added, the sample remixed, and the procedure repeated. If the soil continues to slide on the cup, the test is not applicable and a note should be made that the liquid limit could not be determined.

6. Obtain a moisture content sample by slicing through the soil pat perpendicularly with the spatula and through the center of the groove. Place it into a suitable container for subsequent moisture determination.
7. Determine the moisture content of the moisture content sample in accordance with the FOP for AASHTO T 255/T 265.
8. Place the soil remaining in the cup back in the mixing dish and add 1 to 3 mL of water, or use previously prepared portions to which sufficient water has been added to result in a more fluid condition.
9. Repeat Steps 3 through 8, a minimum of two times. The object is to have a determination in all three shock ranges 25-35, 20-30, & 15-25.

### **Flow Curve – Method A**

Prepare a flow curve on a semi-logarithmic graph with moisture content on the arithmetic vertical axis and the number of shocks on the logarithmic horizontal axis. The flow curve is a straight line drawn as closely as possible through three or more plotted points.

### **Liquid Limit – Method A**

Determine the liquid limit. The moisture content at the intersection of the flow curve and the 25 shock line is the liquid limit.

### **Procedure – Method B (Single-Point)**

1. Place the sample in the dish and thoroughly mix with 8 to 10 mL of distilled or demineralized water, and following the mixing procedure in Method A, Step 1.
2. Follow the procedure in Method A except that the soil pat should be prepared with water to produce a consistency that will close the two halves of the soil pat at least 13 mm (0.5 in.) within 22 to 28 shocks of the cup.

Note: Groove closures occurring between 15 and 40 blows may be accepted if variations of  $\pm 5$  percent of the true liquid limit are tolerable.

3. Return the soil remaining in the cup to the mixing dish and, without adding any additional water, repeat Step 2. If the closure again occurs within the acceptable range, obtain a moisture content specimen.

4. Determine the moisture content of the moisture content sample in accordance with the FOP for AASHTO T 255/T 265.

### Liquid Limit – Method B

Calculate the liquid limit as follows:

$$LL = (w_N)(N/25)^{0.121}$$

N	(N/25) <sup>0.121</sup>	N	(N/25) <sup>0.121</sup>
22	0.985	26	1.005
23	0.990	27	1.009
24	0.995	28	1.014
25	1.000		

$$LL = (w_N)(N/25)^{0.121}$$

where

LL = liquid limit

$w_N$  = moisture content of sample at N blows

N = number of blows

Example:

$w_N = 16.0\%$  and  $N = 23$

$LL = (16.0)(23/25)^{0.121} = 15.8$ , say 16%

### Report

Results shall be reported on standard forms approved by the agency. Report LL to the nearest whole percent.